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FEBRUARY 2 1981

Dear Mrs. Roukema:

I refer to your letter of January 14 addressed to former Secretary Muskie, and your letter of January 26 addressed to Secretary Haig concerning the disappearance in El Salvador of Mr. John J. Sullivan. I understand that Mr. Dan Yeager of your staff has been in regular contact with the Department's Citizens Emergency Center concerning Mr. Sullivan's disappearance and that you are already aware of most of the developments in this case. Nevertheless, I shall recapitulate what action has been taken to date in our efforts to locate Mr. Sullivan and I shall try and answer those questions posed in your letters.

As you know, Mr. Sullivan traveled to El Salvador on December 28, 1980, on board TACA airlines and checked into the San Salvador Sheraton Hotel the same day. The Embassy first became aware of the possible disappearance of Mr. Sullivan late Sunday night, January 4, when the Sheraton Hotel Manager, Mr. Peter Dumas, requested Colonel Bosch, the Embassy's Defense Attache who was residing at that time in the hotel, to go to Mr. Sullivan's room to look at his effects. A hotel maid had apparently alerted Mr. Dumas to the fact that Mr. Sullivan had not been using his room. After inspecting Mr. Sullivan's room, Colonel Bosch telephoned Mr. Howard Lane, Embassy's Public Affairs Officer, at 11:30 p.m. to ask if he knew anything about Mr. Sullivan. This telephone call was made from Mr. Sullivan's room. The Public Affairs Officer was called since it was apparent to Colonel Bosch from the effects in the room that Mr. Sullivan was a journalist. Mr. Lane knew nothing of Mr. Sullivan and told Colonel Bosch that he would go to the Press Secretary in the Foreign Office the following morning, January 5, to inquire about him. In addition, Mr. Lane contacted Salvadoran press officials on January 5 and they in turn made inquiries about Mr. Sullivan with the immigration officials. The Public Affairs Officer spent most of that day trying to find some clue to Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts.

The Honorable
Marge Roukema,
House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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On the morning of January 6, 1981, the Public Affairs Officer advised the Consular Section of the Embassy of Mr. Sullivan's presumed disappearance. The Chief of the Consular Section immediately telephoned and cabled the Citizens Emergency Center in the Department of State and a Department officer located and spoke with Mr. Sullivan's mother, Mrs. John Sullivan, that evening in an effort to determine if the Sullivan family had any knowledge of Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts and, if not, to try to obtain further information about him to assist us in our efforts to try and locate him through the Salvadoran authorities.

To date, the Embassy and the Salvadoran authorities have made extensive efforts to try and locate Mr. Sullivan. Our Embassy personnel have checked local hospitals and prisons, and have interviewed hotel personnel, taxi drivers, waitresses, media representatives, missionaries and airline personnel. In addition, there has been extensive local press coverage in El Salvador, including the publication of Mr. Sullivan's picture and description, as well as radio and television announcements asking for information about him. To date all our efforts to locate him have been unsuccessful.

The Embassy has also been in contact at the highest levels with the Salvadoran Government regarding their efforts to locate Mr. Sullivan. The President of El Salvador has personally assured our Ambassador that Mr. Sullivan is not being held by the Salvadoran authorities and that every effort is being made to determine his whereabouts including the ordering of a nationwide alert to be on the lookout for him.

It is my understanding that the Sullivan family has again suggested that the International Red Cross be requested to physically search prisons in San Salvador to try to locate Mr. Sullivan. While I understand the Sullivan family's reasons for making such a request, it is the considered opinion of our Embassy in El Salvador as well as the responsible officers in the Department of State that such a request would be highly inappropriate and that it would most probably be counterproductive. The Salvadoran Government, at the highest level, has assured us that Mr. Sullivan is not being held by the Government and there appears to be no good reason to question those assurances. Our Embassy has, however, been instructed to ensure that any members of the International Red Cross now in El Salvador are aware Mr. Sullivan is missing, and that any information which might come to their attention regarding his whereabouts be reported to our Embassy immediately.

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You asked the question as to what alternative might be available to avoid a total reliance on Salvadoran authorities in the search for Mr. Sullivan. While it is true that our foreign service posts abroad have neither the authority nor the resources to conduct separate investigations in cases such as this, we do press for full investigation by the host government which has not only the authority but the responsibility and physical resources to investigate such cases. We, of course, provide these authorities with whatever information we are able to gather on the individual and the circumstances of his/her disappearance. There have been cases similar to this in the past where the family or friends have opted to hire the services of a private investigator. I am not certain, given the present circumstances in El Salvador, that this avenue would be either possible or productive. Should the family wish to consider this alternative we will be happy to have the Embassy determine whether this is a feasible course of action and, if so, how best to carry it out.

I hope the above information adequately answers your questions about the efforts our Embassy has taken thus far. and that this information will be helpful to you in your dealings with the Sullivan family.

Sincerely,

Walter L. Cutler
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

bcc: S/S-S-MMorris

CA/OCS/EMR-RMWinge
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S/S 8100616
Ltr. to Sec. Haig
dated 1/26/81 - Advance
copy -- unnumbered

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